

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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INR-10 NSAE-00 RSC-01 PRS-01 EB-03 CIEP-01 OMB-01 L-02

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R 071630Z MAY 74

FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2580

C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 3911

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, CO

SUBJECT: CONVERSATION WITH PRESIDENT-ELECT

1. SUMMARY. IN A PRIVATE LUNCHEON CONVERSATION, PRESIDENT-ELECT LOPEZ RANGED OVER A NUMBER OF TOPICS. HE INDICATED HE WAS MORE INTERESTED IN BILATERAL RELATIONS WITH THE US THAN HEMISPHERIC COMMUNITY, MORE INTERESTED IN MEETING COLOMBIA'S ECONOMIC NEEDS AND PROBLEMS THAN THE ANDEAN PACT PER SE. HE IMPLIED THAT IF IT CAME TO THAT HE WOULD NOT SACRIFICE COLOMBIA'S NEEDS TO A LARGER BLOC CONSIDERATION. HE EXPRESSED CONCERN OVER CARLOS ANDRES PEREZ ECONOMIC ADDRESS, AND SAID THAT HIS ADMINISTRATION WOULD NOT BE TEMPTED TO IMITATE VENEZUELA. HE INDICATED THAT HE IS MOVING VERY CAUTIOUSLY AND SLOWLY IN FORMING HIS GOVERNMENT. ALL IN ALL LOPEZ INDICATED THAT HE WOULD FOLLOW A CAREFUL AND PRAGMATIC COURSE; HE REFLECTED A VERY THOUGHTFUL, SOBER MOOD WITH RESPECT TO THE PROBLEM HE FACES. END SUMMARY

2. PRINCIPAL POINTS LOPEZ MADE WERE AS FOLLOWS:

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A. IN RESPONSE TO MY QUESTION ABOUT HOW HE SAW US-COLOMBIAN RELATIONS OVER THE NEXT SEVERAL YEARS, HE SAID HE SAW NO REAL PROBLEMS. HE WENT ON TO SAY THAT HE WAS NOT A PARTICULAR SUPPORTER OF THE COMMUNITY OR BLOC IDEA, OR OF HEMISPHERE "SOLIDARITY" THAT HE THOUGHT COLOMBIA HAD ITS OWN PROBLEMS AND NEEDS AND THESE WERE NOT THE SAME AS OTHER COUNTRIES; THAT COLOMBIA WOULD OF COURSE ATTEND HEMISPHERE MEETINGS, BUT HE WAS MORE INTERESTED IN A SOUND BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP AND WOULD CONCENTRATE ON THAT.

B. WITH REGARD TO SPECIFIC PROBLEMS, HE DID NOT APPEAR VERY PERTURBED OVER THE CUT FLOWERS ISSUE. HE SAID HE THOUGHT THE CAT SYSTEM SHOULD BE REVISED. HE MUSED THAT HE HAD THOUGHT OF A SYSTEM WHEREBY THE CAT WOULD BE AVAILABLE ONLY IF A PRODUCT'S PRICE FELL BELOW A GIVEN LEVEL. I SAID I WAS NOT SURE IF THAT WOULD ESCAPE THE SUBSIDY DEFINITION. HE MUSED ABOUT OTHER WAYS TO STIMULATE EXPORTS SUCH AS LETTING THE EXCHANGE RATE "CRAWL" A LITTLE FASTER AS THE IMF SUGGESTED. ON FOREIGN INVESTMENT, HE INDICATED THAT THERE WOULD BE STRICT RULES AND TOUGH NEGOTIATIONS ON THINGS LIKE MINING CONCESSIONS, BUT HE DID NOT OPPOSE INVESTMENT. HE WONDERED WHY THE NICKEL PROJECT WAS TAKING SO LONG, AND HE SAID THAT THE GOVERNMENT HAD TO REVISE AND REVIEW ITS RULES AND REGULATIONS (E.G. THE PETROLEUM CODE AND NATURAL GAS) SO THAT A COMPREHENSIVE, MODERN BUT INCENTIVE-GRANTING REGIMEN EXISTED. (HE IMPLIED HE WAS ANXIOUS TO SEE BOTH THE HANNA AND PEABODY PROJECTS GET UNDERWAY.)

C. HE SAID A VAIBLE COFFEE AGREEMENT WAS VERY IMPORTANT TO COLOMBIA.

D. WITH REGARD TO THE ANDEAN PACT, HE REPEATED WHAT HE SAID REGARDING THE HEMISPHERE HE WAS NOT PARTICULARLY ENAMORED WITH BLOC
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POSITIONS AND BLOC ACTION. HE THOUGHT EACH COUNTRY HAD SPECIFIC NEEDS AND THEREFORE UNIFORMITY SHOULD BE NEITHER AUTOMATIC NOR RIGID. THE ABILITY TO MAKE EXCEPTIONS TO GENERAL NORMS WAS IMPORTANT.

E. HE WAS SURPRISED AT CARLOS ANDRES PEREZ ECONOMIC SPEECH, AS MUCH BY ITS

"UNSOPHISTICATION" AS ANYTHING ELSE. PEREZ SEEMED TO JUST THROW IN THE KITCHEN SINK. LOPEZ KNEW PEOPLE WOULD THINK HIS ADMINISTRATION WOULD BE INFLUENCED BY PEREZ BUT HE DID NOT INTEND TO DO ANYTHING SIMILAR. "PEREZ CAN AFFORD TO NATIONALIZE: COLOMBIA COULD NOT".

F. HE WAS STILL IN THE PROCESS OF ORGANIZING HIS GOVERNMENT. HE HAS NOT DECIDED FULLY ON HIS CABINET AND WOULD NOT ANNOUNCE IT UNTIL SHORTLY BEFORE INAUGURATION. HE DID SAY THAT HE WOULD PROBABLY NAME RODRIGO BOTERO AS MINISTER OF FINANCE. HE ASKED THIS BE HELD IN CONFIDENCE, THOUGH HE SAID HE ASSUMED IT WOULD BEGIN TO LEAK SINCE HA HAD DESIGNATED BOTERO AS HIS LIAISON WITH MINISTER ECHEVERRIA. I ASKED HIM WHOM HE WOULD NAME AS FOREIGN MINISTER, AND HE SAID "PROBABLY TURBAY". HE SAID HE OWED TURBAY A DEBT, AND IF TURBAY WANTED IT HE WOULD NAME HIM. HE HAD SUGGESTED THIS TO TURBAY BEFORE THE ELECTION, AND THE LATTER ASKED THAT THEY TALK ABOUT IT AGAIN AFTER THE ELECTION. HE HAS NOT HAD A CHANCE TO DO SO YET. IF IT WAS NOT TURBAY, HE WAS NOT SURE WHOM HE WOULD NAME. LOPEZ SAID HE WANTED NEW FACES IN THE CABINET, AND HE WOULD APPOINT A NUMBER OF WOMEN TO POSITIONS IN HIS GOVERNMENT.
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